

HUMAN RIGHTS HYPOCRISY

Questions over Mann treatment

Human rights activists have attacked the attitude being taken by the British media and state over the extradition of notorious English mercenary Simon Mann to Equatorial Guinea, while both fail to tackle severe deportation and economic policy questions between the two countries.

The foreign office have demanded free access to Mann, citing fears over the country's human rights record. Julian Lewis, Conservative MP for New Forest East, said: "Quiet diplomacy has failed and we now have to save this man, whatever he has and hasn't done, from torture and a horrible death."

Law Lords have gone so far as to ban a damages claim brought against Mann in the UK in response to allegations that he will not see a fair trial or humane treatment.

Mann has already been convicted of illegal arms dealing and is accused of plotting a coup to install a new dictatorship in Equatorial Guinea in exchange for oil concessions.

Emma Ginn, an activist from the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns explained that the policies of the UK do not

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LENS CAP GREEK POLICE BLIND?



In this photo by a Greek anarchist photographer, fascists from the paramilitary group Golden Dawn stand behind Greek police, armed with sticks and knives at a standoff against anti-fascists in Athens. This and other photos showing what appears to be direct police collusion with Greek fascist groups can be seen at athens.indymedia.org

LEAFLETING BAN SHOCK

Under a little-known 2006 amendment to environmental law, a local council in Swindon has shown it is possible to effectively ban all political leafleting from the town centre.

Using the Clean Neighbourhood Act, Swindon council has the ability to hand out fixed penalty notices to any groups found to have been leafleting, including businesses and campaigning groups, but excluding charities.

The proposals, which are still to go to the town's cabinet, are already being implemented by many local businesses after council employees started advising people that it is likely to be passed soon.

The measure means groups such as No2ID, Swindon Animal Concern, Swindon Stop the War and others will be effectively unable to

run stalls, adding to the closing down of dissenting voices already seen through recent police bans on demonstrations.

According to the council, the Act is being used to reduce litter dropped on the street, but local groups have slammed the measures. A spokesperson for Swindon Stop The War said: "We have to be clear that the town centre is not just for shopping, it is a public space that belongs to the people of Swindon, and we should be able to use it for peaceful debate, and handing out leaflets."

On a national level, fears have been raised that successful implementation of the measure could eventually see it extended to other areas, raising the prospect of a widescale banning of one of the few realistic forms of alternative information dissemination.

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NEWS

IN BRIEF

COASTGUARD: More than 700 people working across the UK for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) are being balloted for strike action in a dispute over pay.

The move, which could see staff go on strike for the first time in the organisation's history, is in response to pay levels that fall way behind those paid to other emergency services and below inflation cost of living increases. Over 700 members have been taking part in industrial action short of a strike since the end of May last year. The strike ballot closes on 27th February 2008, with the result being announced shortly after.

DIPLOMACY: Staff members at the British Embassy in Dublin have gone on strike, but are barred from talking about their work by the Official Secrets Act. They are angry that three of their colleagues are to lose their jobs in compulsory redundancies.

The embassy is the only British diplomatic mission in the world where workers are members of a trade union. Unite members voted 90% in favour of strike action.

ELECTIONS: Activist artist Banksy has donated work to raise funds for Ken Livingstone's mayoral election campaign. The stencilist was one of over 20 artists who have handed over pieces which will be sold at auction next month with proceeds going towards Livingstone's campaign to secure a third term.

Livingstone, known in left circles as 'Yellow Ken' for his role in encouraging tube strikers to break their own picket lines, is pitted against Tory Boris Johnson, and Lib Dem Brian Paddick, who has himself come out saying he intends to break unionism in the underground.

HOUSING: Unemployed council and housing association tenants should seek work or face losing their homes, housing minister Caroline Flint has suggested.

She said new applicants for social housing might sign "commitment contracts" pledging to seek employment.

POLICE: The Tories have said that they plan to give police complete freedom to stop and search who they choose, without any need for suspicion or additional authorisation. The Labour government are not far behind. They have announced the end of stop and search forms, which restricted the extent to which the police could abuse their powers, and more measures to 'free up' the police are on their way.

TAX: The Government needs to raise taxes by £8 billion, or £250 for each family in the UK, to meet its own targets on public finances, says a respected economic think-tank. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) said one way the Government could raise the money would be to reverse its decision to cut the basic rate of tax.

From April, the basic rate of tax is set to fall from 22% to 20%.

LENS CAP CRITICAL MASS



This man has finally been cleared of obstructing the highway and assaulting a police officer after a six month ordeal in court. His crime? In May, he attempted to stop a car driver from leaving the scene after they allegedly knocked a Critical Mass cyclist from their bike.

Building networks

A meeting of Radical Routes, the housing and social centre co-op group, took place in Brighton over 8th and 9th February. One attendee at the gathering commented that it appeared to be continuing to progress well, with a prospective co-op, Enheduanna (named after a Mesopotamian feminist who lived from 2285–2250BC) being approved for a loan towards its project, and Rootstock – the funding body of the organisation – reporting it is already around halfway to meeting its target of £100k raised. Strong concerns were brought up regarding the future of benefits in the UK and here are plans to campaign against proposed changes which could hit housing in particular (see Svartfrosk column, page 10).

At the other end of the country, the 2008 National Squatters Meeting took

place on 9th and 10th February at a newly opened squatted space in Headingly, discussing every aspect of autonomous space in the UK.

Some of the discussions included the possibility of building links between squats and autonomous spaces in the UK, how to use autonomous spaces more effectively against issues such as surveillance culture, gentrification and control of space in everyday life.

Other issues of debate included the rise of fully-owned spaces such as Kebele and The Cowley Club, which are affiliated to Radical Routes, and their effect on the squatted movement.

Leeds, which is also home to the Common Place, hosts the A-Spire collective, which has raised radical squats around the Leeds area for several years.





BP job losses

BP are taking the opportunity provided by its recent announcement of weaker annual profits to implement wholesale job cuts across the business.

Around 5,000 people are to be dropped, primarily in the UK and US, in a cost-cutting drive after profits 'slumped' to £8.7bn this year. These will be on top of over 9,000 jobs which the company are set to lose by franchising out services. BP employs 97,000 people globally.

The aim is to save £764m a year through the changes, which will see a minimum of 1,500 UK jobs go, mostly from corporate and marketing work.

However the company, which blames rising extraction costs for its fall in profits, is generally considered to be in a stronger

position than Shell, which posted record profits late last month.

Shell's output and discoveries of new resources have both fallen in the past year, and while it is heavily involved in developing technology to exploit 'oil sands' in Canada (these are thought to be a potential source of oil rivaling Saudi Arabia, but require far greater resources to extract), costs at the company have soared. Its huge dividends and profit margins, boosted by record oil prices, belie a fall in production.

Unlike its arch-rival, BP has found enough new deposits to replace its entire current output, and after some major capital outlays from one-off incidents in Texas and the Gulf saw its production levels hit a new high in the fourth quarter of last year.

BP's optimism over its future was reflected in its share dividends, which rose by 31% for 2008, with promises that profits and production would rise.

The company is investing in several major projects around the world, with significant investments recently set in the Gulf of Mexico, Egypt, Trinidad, and controversially Angola, where a dictatorship is in place and which has one of the most corrupt governments in the world.

Given this rosy outlook, questions have risen over both BP's continued higher prices, and its attacks on employees. Massive hikes in fuel prices have hit vulnerable sectors of society hard in the winter months, as oil companies continue to raise prices to whatever the market will bear.

Human rights hypocrisy

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tally with its attitude to Mann's treatment.

While criticising the decision to incarcerate Mann, the British government has itself refused to rule out sending asylum seekers who claim they could be jailed or tortured to Equatorial Guinea as recently as April 2007.

Liam Byrne, Home Office Minister at the time, said: "Individual claimants who have been found by both the Home Office and the Independent Appeals Process not to be in need of protection are expected to leave the UK. If they do not leave voluntarily, they may have their return enforced."

Equatorial Guinea has also recently been the recipient of huge investment both from the UK and other western countries in the

last few years, almost solely to aid in the extraction of its substantial oil and gas deposits.

Foreign direct investment for 2006 alone – the most recent period for which figures are available, was worth around \$1.2bn to this end. While this placed Equatorial Guinea second among the world's Least Developed Countries in terms of FDI, it continues to rank amongst the lowest in terms of general development and social improvement.

In part, this reflects the low stake held in oil exploitation profits by the state – over 92% of its fuel resources are owned and operated by transnational companies, who employ mostly expats rather than native

labour, so little of the vast profits being drawn from the sector filter into the general population, which still has an average life expectancy of 47 years.

Among the major companies involved in this ongoing raid on resources is BG, formerly known as British Gas, which has bought up the rights to \$15bn worth of natural gas, with allegations that direct payments were paid to government officials for the privilege.

These activities, which effectively help to prop up and legitimate Equatorial Guinea's dictatorship despite its rampant corruption and disregard of human rights, have faced no censure and there is no prospect of action being taken in the near future.

PUBLIC SECTOR

Teachers threaten strike action

Upheavals in education could mean both the universities and colleges union UCU and teacher's union the NUT come out on strike in April over low pay, even as a conflict grows within the sector over national pay deals.

After disappointing negotiations last year in which educators saw a 2.55% pay rise, well below the rate of inflation (4% RPI), this year's pay claim has prompted a day of action to be called from 21st to 25th April, with a strike on the 24th.

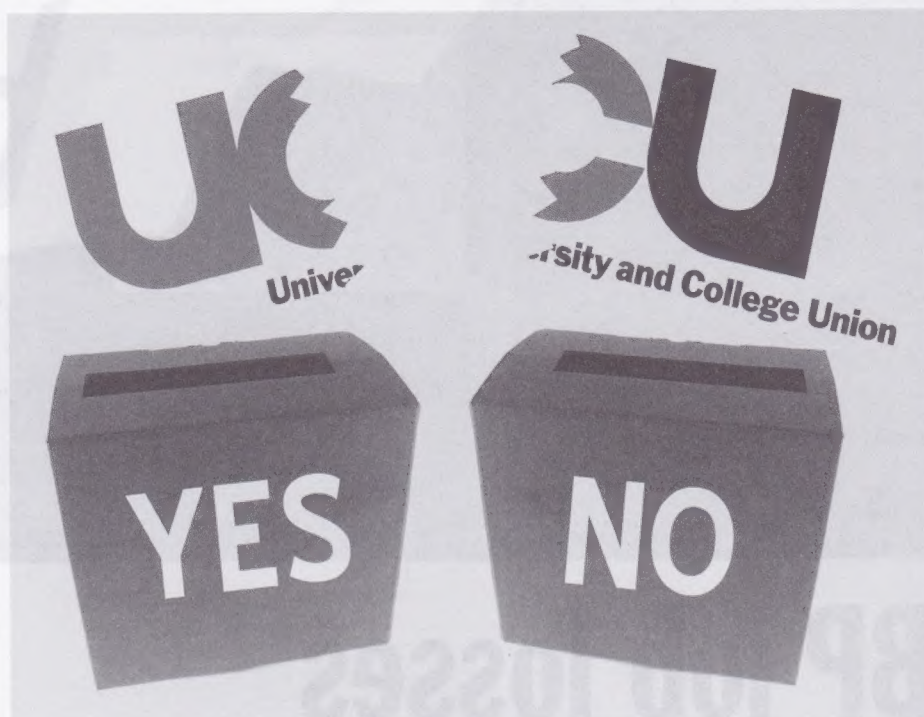
UCU are demanding a catch-up pay rise of 6% to bring lecturers' wages into parity with those of teachers, and a minimum wage for all including support staff, caterers and librarians of £7.38 an hour.

The NUT meanwhile are campaigning for an improvement to their own pay offer of 2.45%. Teachers' pay was also increased by less than inflation in 2005, 2006 and 2007. Every teacher has lost at least £1,000 a year or more, and heavy student debts have been causing hardship for new teachers coming into the sector.

But in further education the renegotiation of the national bargaining agreement, known as JNCHES, has muddled the waters with a growing debate on whether to agree to new negotiating procedure which would effectively rule out industrial action outside the summer months.

The proposal has already been agreed by the UCU's sister unions Unison, Unite and the GMB, on the grounds it is currently the only way to retain national bargaining, which is considered vital to include and protect weaker branches.

But the trade-off, which would hamstring militants and block negotiations on special



interests, has split UCU chiefs, who have sent the issue to ballot for the end of this month.

A member of the Education Workers Network, a militant campaigning organisation attached to the anarcho-syndicalist Solidarity Federation, said: "Yes national bargaining by all the unions together is what we would argue for, but not at any cost. UCU's position when the bits about special interests are taken out is more what I think I'd go for. UCU and its constituent parts have been the more active of the unions

nationally in the last half dozen years, but only just. It's such a low point of activity across the sector that it's not surprising that other unions are willing to accept the sop from the employers of retaining what little is left of national bargaining for the time being (we lost the bulk of the rest a few years ago)."

Early indications suggest support for the No position in more active branches, with Salford already publicly announcing its intention to vote against the proposals.

Lone parent crackdown

Within the next two years changes to the benefit system will see single parents forced to look for work as soon as their child hits the age of seven, or face losing their income support.

Alongside other measures in the Welfare Reform Act 2007, all parents of children seven or over will be placed on Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) and will be expected to look for work, attend job interviews and training sessions, in exchange for 'personalised support'. This support will take the form of extensions to childcare provision according to the government, but JSA has become notorious in recent years for the punitive tactics used to throw people off benefits altogether, while payouts have diminished and groups such as the London Coalition Against Poverty have taken on large numbers of mishandled cases.

Workers at the Citizens' Advice Bureaux have also reported a growing number of

cases of people being mistreated by the benefits system.

Target-driven workers are encouraged to find any excuse to remove people from the lists, while severe cuts to the civil service has led to intense case-load pressures on the remaining workforce, leading to fears that the parents and their children could be put at risk of falling through the cracks should they become a victim of this process.

The measures could affect up to 300,000 parents across the UK who at present can claim income support for themselves until their youngest child reaches 16.

Campaigning groups have expressed fears that children too old for childcare but too vulnerable to be left alone, particularly aged 10-13 years, could be put at risk by the new measures.

In addition, lone parents who are returning to education may also lose income support and have to sign on instead, effectively crippling

their ability to train up in desirable skills.

The Social Security Advisory Committee commented: "We are concerned that the green paper proposes greater responsibility upon claimants without balancing proposals for how the rights of claimants will be enhanced."

The staged rollout will begin in October of this year, being introduced for parents of children aged 12 or over, with the age dropping to 10 the following year and seven from October 2010.

Meanwhile, a new report has attacked the government's handling of the existing benefits system, saying it is poorly designed and has not been providing the help promised to raise children out of poverty.

Westminster's Scottish Affairs Committee highlighted the complexity of the benefits system and said the poorest children were not being helped by means tested benefits such as tax credits.

IN BRIEF

ENERGY: The large subsidies paid by electricity users to fund the drive towards wind power are generating profits for existing wind farm owners – without producing many new turbines. A huge expansion of wind energy is needed to meet the government's climate change targets, and the amount of subsidy paid to renewable power generators through consumers' electricity bills will rise from more than £600m a year to £3bn a year by 2020.

GM CROPS: A new application to trial GM potatoes with an apparent resistance to potato cyst nematodes has been put in at Leeds University. The site is Headley Hall Farm, Spen Common Lane, Tadcaster LS24 9NT, halfway between Leeds and York. The actual trial is proposed to begin for 1st April 2008 and is set on university land. The trial is to be carried out by the university and will be funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). Details of application can be found at: gmoinfo.jrc.it/gmp_report.aspx?CurNot=B/GB/07/R31/1

There is a call for the public to make representations until 3rd March.

MANUFACTURING: Workers at Rolls Royce in Bootle have reacted angrily to an announcement that it intends to close its plant in Bootle with the loss of more than 200 highly skilled jobs. The news was announced shortly before Rolls Royce announced a record year for profits, new deals and turnover across the business. Profits rose by 13%, its new order book was up by over 76% (mostly on the back of business from the Middle East and Asia) and turnover rose by 6%. The decision comes after a 90-day consultation during which the workers have presented alternative business plans for the profitable gas turbine plant.

The workers say that it became obvious through the consultation process that the company had already made up its mind.

Rolls Royce says that redundancies will start as early as April this year with complete closure by the beginning of 2009.

TAX: Tax avoidance by corporations and individuals costs the exchequer £25bn a year, according to the TUC. The trade union umbrella body said its research found that wealthy individuals had legally avoided £13bn while corporations had avoided £12bn.

TUBE: The RMT and TSSA rail unions have told London Underground that ticket-office closures, de-staffing, lone working, introduction of 'mobile supervisors', use of agency and security staff and other disputed policies amount to an unacceptable attack on safety standards and the casualisation of safety-critical work.

"Each of these issues is serious in its own right, but together they amount to a fundamental and unacceptable attack on staffing across the network which strikes at the very heart of its safe operation," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

Power play for our cash

Just weeks after water regulator Ofwat suggested modifying its structure to a model more like that of the energy industry to "make the regulator obsolete", massive price hikes from Powergen have drawn accusations of cartel-like behaviour.

Calls have been made for an investigation by the Competition Commission into the energy industry after Powergen announced a 9.7% rise in electricity prices and 15% for gas.

It is just the latest in a series of rises which are expected to be mirrored by Scottish & Southern in the near future. Of the six major suppliers remaining in the UK post-privatisation, British Gas, npower and ScottishPower have already announced similar hikes to Powergen.

The companies blame the price rises on wholesale cost increases, but the multinational companies have not imposed similar measures elsewhere, with Germany's own rises three times lower than the UK's.

E.ON has raised German gas bills by only 4.4% since October, while electricity rates remain unchanged in most regions, a figure reflected in npower, Scottish Power and EDF's prices.

The closely matched actions of all the major energy players, alongside the speed at which mergers have removed all vestige of competition in the market, have undermined neo-liberal claims that private operation is inherently the most efficient way of working.

Across the industry since 2003, gas bills have increased by 86% and electricity bills by 64%, causing hardship in impoverished communities across the country.

Adam Scorer of the consumer watchdog Energywatch said: "It seems undeniable that powerful European gas producers treat Britain's open energy market as a treasure island to be plundered for cheap gas when the price is low and then fleeced with punitive prices when demand grows."

"All the companies have quoted different percentage rises in wholesale gas costs, all the companies have different electricity generation, they all have different hedging strategies, yet they come within £13 of each other on a £1,000 bill."

A further merger in the offing, between EDF, of France, and Iberdrola, of Spain, would unite the fifth and sixth-ranked energy suppliers in Britain



Metronet debt is ours

The credibility of Public Private Partnerships has suffered a further blow after it emerged that one of London's biggest schemes is to be bailed out by the taxpayer.

The debts of the London tube PFI, run by Metronet, have now been guaranteed by the Department for Transport after it declared bankruptcy last year.

The company fell into bankruptcy owing huge sums, primarily to companies which both owned and supplied it. *Freedom* reported over two years ago on the bizarre setup, which saw major investors such as Balfour Beattie also providing most of the equipment which Metronet was supposed to use to complete major upgrades to the tube system.

Simultaneously, despite warnings of huge

cost overruns, Metronet was giving large bonuses to senior management and investors, and drew large sums out of state contingency money to cover its growing debts.

The company was repeatedly criticised by watchdogs and official sources for spending large sums on projects but with little to show for it.

One of the major excuses for using PFI is that the company takes the financial risk, which is supposed to help justify the large sums it charges over a 30 year cycle.

Yet when Metronet went to the wall in July last year, after repeated government bailouts, 95% of the £1.7bn debt it had accrued was transferred to the state, with companies like Balfour Beattie bearing no responsibility for the mess.

INTERNATIONAL

IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH: Hundreds of Bangladeshi garment workers held angry demonstrations in the capital Dhaka after one of their colleagues was beaten to death by factory security guards. More than 500 workers tried to put up barricades on a busy highway that connects the capital with southern and western Bangladesh.

BELGIUM: Bus drivers from the La Louvière depot have walked out after a colleague was robbed at gunpoint. The strikes come a week after rail workers launched wildcat action after two colleagues were assaulted. Workers agreed that there would be no blockades or impediments to non-strikers. In spite of this only one bus ran on Tuesday and workers voted to continue strike action. Management has offered some concessions to workers.

FRANCE: A one-day strike has taken place to protest against government plans to 'reform' public television services. Workers fear redundancies and there have been reports, denied by the government, that France 3 will be privatised.

GREECE: Two people were stabbed and a further two hit with stones in a confrontation in Kolokotroni Square, Athens. Around 50 fascists had gathered in the square for a demonstration, protected by a cordon of police, when they were attacked by militant anti-fascists. In early fighting two anti-fascists were stabbed, with one seriously injured, but stable, and the other lightly wounded.

Later on in the day reinforcements turned out, swelling the anti-fascist ranks to 600. Police were forced to disperse the fascists, but not before a local MP had noticed them handing out sticks to the far-right grouping.

HOLLAND: Cleaners have won higher wages, vocational training, language courses and a more transparent collective agreement. Apart from an increase in wages, the contract contains a unique agreement on integration courses for new workers. The campaign itself was unique too, at least for the Netherlands. In Amsterdam, cleaners and activists accompanied by a samba band and rebel clowns stormed the ING Bank headquarters and gave a guerrilla concert at Schiphol Airport.

IRAQ: The British polling agency ORB (Opinion Research Business) issued survey results on 28th January confirming previous estimates that up to 1.2 million violent deaths have taken place in Iraq since March 2003. The agency commented at the time that US-occupied Iraq had "a murder rate that now exceeds the Rwanda genocide from 1994 (800,000 murdered)".

POLAND: The strikers of the Budryk mine in Ornontowice, southern Poland, have gone back to work after a 46-day protest, after union bosses pulled the plug. The miners will receive a 10% pay rise and a one-off payment equivalent to 1,500 zlotys. The miners are critical of the agreement, which only partially met their demands.

LENS CAP NATO CONFERENCE 'SUPPORT'



Around 300 people turn out in Munich, Germany, to 'support' a NATO conference being held in the city. The group, which named itself 'the capitalistic white bloc', called for more war and fewer civil liberties. The protest may have contained an element of sarcasm.

Hunger strike in Chile

In the VII, VIII and IX regions of Chile, live the Mapuche. The land they have farmed and lived on for years is being encroached by big forestry and hydro-electric businesses with the connivance of the Chilean state.

Mapuche resistance to this process has been criminalised and repressed. The army has killed protestors, both Mapuche and non-Mapuche, as resistance has grown to the environmental degradation and land seizures.

Patricia Troncoso was convicted in 2003 for her alleged involvement in burning a plantation belonging to one of the forestry companies. The law that was used was a Pinochet-era anti-terrorist law.

On 10th October last year, she began a hunger strike to protest this with four other prisoners – Jose Huenchunao, Juan

Millalen, Jaime Marileo and Hector Llaitul. After a couple of months, the others ended their fast but she continued. She was transferred to a secure hospital in Santiago, remaining determined to see her hunger strike through.

Comrades in Chile asked the IWA for help in publicising this case, so South London Solidarity Federation joined Mapuche and Chilean human rights activists for protests outside the Chilean embassy in London on 25th and 29th January.

The protests were small, but called loudly for the end of the brutality towards the hunger strikers, including the force-feeding of Patricia Troncoso, and an end to the repression of the Mapuche. After more than 105 days, Patricia gave up her hunger strike.

South London Solidarity Federation

Notes from the United States

Towards the end of January a motion was put to the Town Council of Brattleboro in Vermont. It offers residents the chance to vote on whether George Bush and Dick Cheney are to be arrested if they ever step foot in Vermont. Indicted and arrested, that is, for war crimes, perjury and obstruction of justice. It was passed 3-2.

Now it will go to a paper ballot, which is due by 4th March. Kurt Daims, a 54 year-old from Brattleboro and organiser of the petition drive, said "... the debate to get the

issue on the ballot was a good one. Opposition to the vote focused on whether the town had any power to endorse the matter." It has only taken three months to gather the requisite 500 signatures; most people approached were apparently keen to sign.

In addition to being responsible for the deaths of up to a million people, it's the junta's lies to lawmakers – and their illegal use of spying on citizens – that supporters

Cocaine plane's rendition link

Aircraft plates implicated in CIA black ops

In the last six months, one aircraft registration number has been implicated in two of the most controversial topics of recent times; the practice of 'extraordinary rendition' – where terror suspects are taken to countries where torture is allowed to bypass US law – and to recent allegations of ongoing CIA cocaine trafficking in Central America.

The FAA registration number N168D is seen on two different aircraft in the pictures opposite. In the main picture taken by North Carolina Stop Torture Now in July of last year, the plate was spotted on a plane parked in a CIA-leased facility which has been linked to extraordinary rendition.

It was at the time owned by Devon Holding, a shell company set up by the CIA which has no employees other than a company lawyer, which was hauled over the coals by the EU as part of its investigation into rendition.

In the second picture, taken by the Humboldt Rescue Organization in 2004, the same FAA number is seen on the back of a completely different plane. This plane was carrying 1,100 kilos of cocaine along with a cache of automatic weapons and had been abandoned in a Nicaraguan cotton field.

This re-use of plates on different aircraft for CIA operations was explained in the EU's investigation, which found in a 2006 report that registration numbers are routinely shifted around for the CIA's fleet of aircraft to avoid recognition.

The EU suggested that there were 51 aircraft used in rendition practices, but 57 registration numbers, which would allow for



'hot' numbers to be given a cooling off period between missions.

Investigative website NarcoNews have been investigating the background to the cocaine-carrying incident, and got hold of a former US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) official, who explained that there were telltale signs that it was a governmental operation, rather than being run by drug smugglers.

He noted that the burning of the plane would not have been bungled, and the witness and guns would not have been left behind if it had been a real smuggling operation.

He suggested that ICE itself was the likely vehicle for such operations, as it has a free pass across the US border, and has been heavily infiltrated by the CIA in recent years.

Research into the plane's real identity by the Humboldt Rescue Organization found

that it was actually N391SA, and registered to a company called Skyway Aircraft Inc., run by ex-intelligence community contract manager James Kent and linked to Skyway Communications.

Kent's company, now liquidated along with Skyway Communications, was also linked to a DC-9 jetliner which was seized in Mexico, while SkyWay's holding company, SkyWay Holding Corp., entered into an agreement with Titan, the US defence contracting giant specialising in intelligence solutions.

Journalists began investigating the paper-trail for the planes late last year, after a Gulfstream II jet carrying four tonnes of cocaine crash landed and was subsequently found to be part of an operation being carried out by the Department of Homeland Security codenamed 'Mayan Express'.

Notes from the Unites States

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of the ballot are most concerned about.

Vermont is not alone: activists in Louisville, Kentucky and Montague, Massachusetts are planning similar symbolic actions. And in Vermont state legislators are also about to introduce a measure calling on the Governor, Jim Douglas, to call the Vermont National Guard back from Iraq.

It's to be noted that – after promised withdrawals – the Bush administration has now acknowledged that it may not order the return of any US troops from Iraq beyond those scheduled for this summer and that the number of soldiers involved in the US occupation of Iraq could be larger than before the 'surge' of a year ago.

What the citizens of Brattleboro are doing ought to be a popular move among many Americans – for all its symbolic weight. Originally, the Brattleboro town

office was swamped with negative, abuse and threatening calls, emails and faxes.

As time has gone on and the word about the initiative spread, it's been the opposite. In recent days the town clerk and her staff have been spending well over half their time answering the over 1,000 phone calls and emails received. Over two thirds are now supportive.

Meanwhile, Bush has declared that he has the right to ignore and bypass a new law that prohibits the use of taxpayer money to establish permanent US bases in Iraq. The ban was passed as part of the new National Defense Authorization Act. That measure stops federal funding "[from] establish[ing] any military installation or base for the purpose of providing for the permanent stationing" of US forces or "[from] exercis[ing] United States control of the oil resources of Iraq".

Moroccan clean-up

Raids against asylum seekers in Morocco saw 2,000 arrests just days before a political summit between EU and African politicians in Rabat over its integration into the EU. The clean-up, which Moroccan activists say struck heaviest in Nador, Casablanca and Rabat, took place late last month ahead of the summit in front of large numbers of international journalists who had congregated to cover the event.

Raids on a similar scale have taken place several times in Morocco since 2006, since Algerian border guards started hounding migrants along the border of the North African state.

The summit had gathered to talk about how liberalisation of Moroccan markets can move forward, with EU negotiators stipulating that migration must be stopped more effectively by Moroccan forces for further investment to take place. Morocco has already been accused of violating human rights by mass deporting migrants into the desert.

FEATURE

Rovics: the interview

Singer-songwriter David Rovics – a man described variously as “the last American protest singer”, “a guy George W. Bush would probably like to clamp in chains at Guantanamo Bay” and “the peace poet and troubadour of our time” is well-known for, among other things, his vociferous campaigning for the Palestinian cause. The following is part of an interview with David carried out earlier this year by James Horrox in Boston, Massachusetts.

James Horrox: Your Jewish roots add an extra dimension to your involvement with the Palestinian solidarity movement; as a Jewish-American fighting the Palestinian corner I guess it almost goes without saying that you’ve attracted the label ‘self-loathing Jew’. How would you respond to that?

David Rovics: Yeah, I hate that phrase, ‘self-loathing Jew’, I really hate it – but I’ve been called it so many times! I come from an assimilated background, which I don’t see as a negative thing, but at the same time I think it’s a real shame that certain elements of my family felt so ostracised from the Jewish community in the New York area that they felt like they had to really distance themselves from it.

I think that that kind of mentality is part of the self-hatred that exists among almost all immigrant groups who come to the United States though. Having the wrong complexion or an accent that wasn’t American was grounds for savage beatings on a regular basis if you were a young man in New York City in the early twentieth century, as my grandfather was. There was a massive influx of immigration doing very intense things to the US economy and causing a lot of misery for a lot of people in a lot of different ways – for the immigrants, for the people whose jobs they were competing for ... It was a huge societal disruption, and it created a very violent atmosphere.

One of the consequences was a tremendous prejudice against anybody who wasn’t from the United States. That included Europeans, and it certainly included Jews. The Jewish community faced enormous prejudice, as did

all the other immigrant communities at that time. Immigrant groups who dealt with that became traumatised as a whole, and I think the term *self-hatred* could probably apply not just to Jews, but to anybody who was part of that experience of immigration and the desperate desire to assimilate in order to not be persecuted.

JH: American anarchist Wayne Price has argued that recognition of the humanity and collective rights of Israeli Jews should be viewed as *secondary* to taking the side of the Palestinians in their struggle against Israeli occupation. Asking people to view someone else’s humanity as secondary to anything is clearly not anarchism, but nonetheless, Price’s words seem symptomatic of an increasingly prevalent theme in leftist critiques of Israel-Palestine. Where do you stand on this?

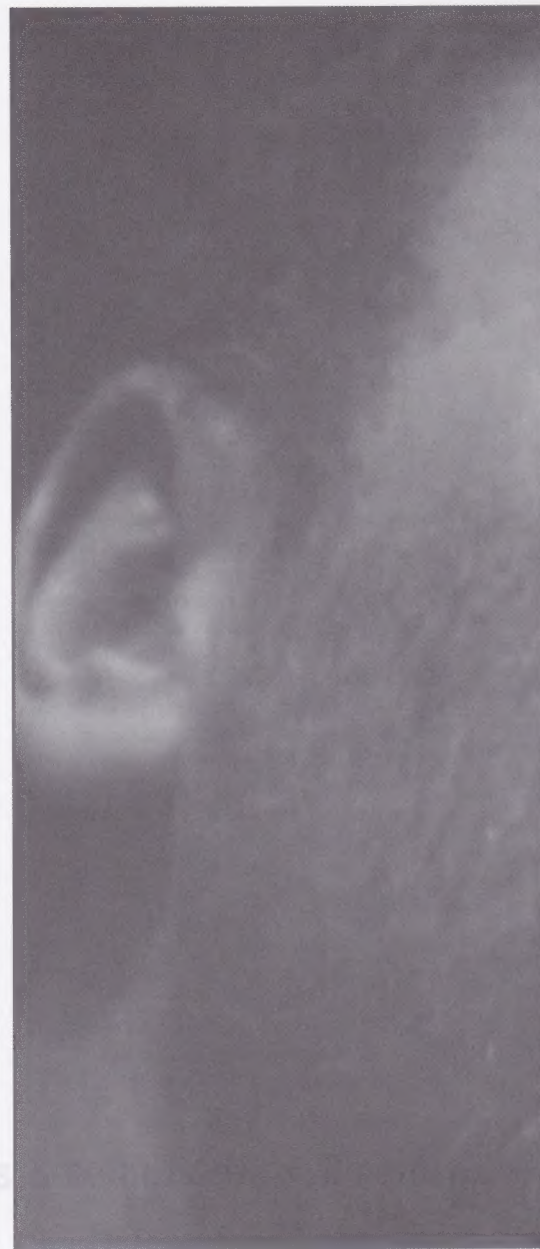
DR: Jews have always lived in the Middle East, and they’ve always been treated much better there than in most other parts of the world. If you look at the treatment of Jews in the Middle East for the past several thousand years in contrast that of Jews in Europe, there’s absolutely no comparison.

With the horrendous exception of the Armenian Genocide, the Middle East was comparatively free of the kind of vicious treatment of ethnic and religious minorities that Europe is well-known for, or should be well-known for. Before the twentieth Century, the Middle East was a place that many people from Europe, not just Jews but all sorts of other persecuted minorities were fleeing to in order to be free of persecution.

The Jews obviously have every right to live in Palestine, just like everybody else has, and they’ve lived there for many thousands of years. What they don’t have the right to do, and what no-one has the right to do in a society as diverse as Palestine, is to say ‘this is our society’. No Muslim sect or Christian sect or Jewish sect has any right to take over and say ‘okay, we’re running the show here now’. And that’s what we’re talking about here incidentally. We’re talking about a Jewish sect. We’re talking about a component of global Judaism which has decided, against the will of probably the majority of Jews around the world, that Jews should be running the show in Palestine, and should be displacing and oppressing other groups. Nobody has the right to be doing that. The Jews don’t and nobody else does.

This was certainly the predominant opinion among global Jewry at the time of the formation of Israel. Even after 1948, most Jews did not support the creation of the State of Israel, but there was a large enough minority, and a militant enough minority, and a wealthy enough minority, who did.

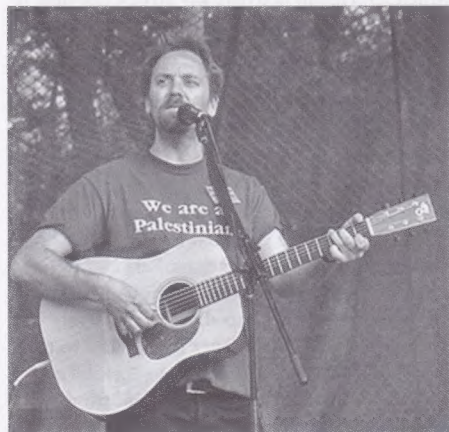
Most Palestinians I speak to say that they want to live in a secular democratic society where Jews can live and everybody else can



live and get along, which I think is amazing coming from Palestinians, most of whom have had immediate family members killed by Israeli soldiers, most of whom have been arrested, many of whom have been tortured. If other people are not saying that kind of thing I don’t think that anybody should be even remotely surprised.

JH: For many people, I guess particularly here in the US, your outspoken support of Hezbollah and admiration for Hassan Nasrallah would nevertheless be somewhat difficult to stomach.

DR: People tend to lump so-called ‘Islamist’ movements together, and really that’s not something that can be done. Islam is just far too diverse a religion and there’s far too many things going on to be able to do that.



FEATURE



The political differences between Hezbollah and groups like Al-Qaeda, for example, are so massive that the differences far outweigh the similarities. The kind of tactics that Al-Qaeda engages in, and the kind of rigid, Islamist, Sharia Law type of mentality that the leadership of Al-Qaeda have, has nothing to do with Hezbollah.

As far as I'm concerned, Hezbollah are engaged in a very justified struggle for the sovereignty of their country and their people. Sure, they're not beyond criticism, but I think they're an extremely impressive organisation and worthy of a lot of praise in a lot of different areas.

They're running a lot of different institutions in Lebanon such as the television station and the hospital; they have almost no corruption to speak of – when they get

money, they use it for what they say they're going to use it for. South Beirut was completely destroyed by Israel last summer, and since then Hezbollah has built twenty-five thousand houses, some of the buildings bigger than they were before the war. I don't think there's any government outside of Cuba that is capable of that kind of efficiency and service to their fellow people. They've also evolved quite a bit since their inception to become much more inclusive, much less dogmatic, and also much more pro-gender equality, with women at virtually all levels of the organisation now.

Nasrallah knows that he represents the vast majority of the Shia, but he's not trying to pretend he represents everybody else, and he's not saying that he should. Hezbollah don't want to see the Shia running Lebanon,

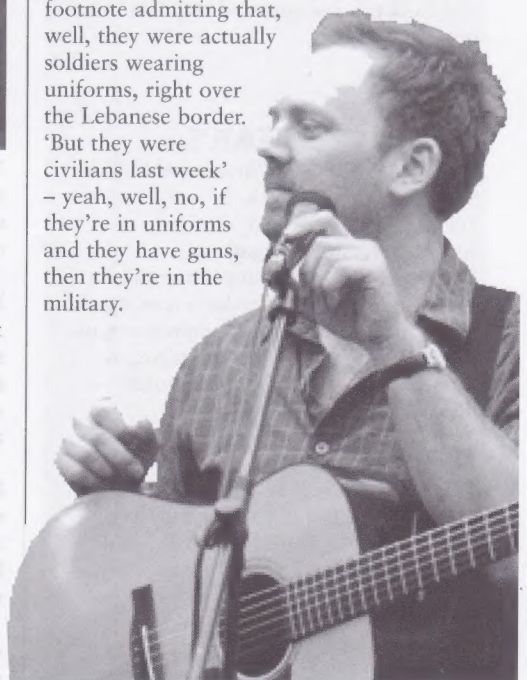
and they don't want to see themselves running Lebanon. Nasrallah's made it very clear that they want a secular, democratic, diverse society in which every element of Lebanese society has a voice. In that sense I think they have more in common with the Zapatistas than they do with groups like the Taliban or Al-Qaeda.

If you believe what seems to be out there in terms of Al-Qaeda's perspective they want to see the wholesale imposition of Sharia law and the Islamist faith, and they have no problem with killing civilians in the process. None of this is true of Hezbollah.

JH: During the conflict last summer it was portrayed that Hezbollah were specifically trying to maximise Israeli civilian casualties...

DR: Yeah, I mean, Hezbollah simply don't have the technology for the kind of accuracy that Israel's capable of. During the 2006 conflict, Israel was quite clearly aiming for civilians, but Hezbollah were targeting military facilities in areas that they could reach in Israel. In many cases they successfully targeted those facilities. The Israeli government has a real tight control on both foreign and domestic media operating inside of Israel, so you don't hear about the successful strikes, but they were actually hitting military installations.

If you look at the number of fatalities you'll also see that the vast majority of the Israelis killed by Hezbollah rockets were actually military personnel. Obviously, in Israel that's not difficult since most of its population is in the military, but at the same time it still means they're military targets. I remember at some point there was some report of twelve Israeli civilians being killed in a rocket attack. Then they had to add a footnote admitting that, well, they were actually soldiers wearing uniforms, right over the Lebanese border. 'But they were civilians last week' – yeah, well, no, if they're in uniforms and they have guns, then they're in the military.



COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

It's been an interesting feedback process for our new look *Freedom* thus far, thank you to all those who have commented – it's the only way we can really judge how we've done.

There has, on the whole, been a positive response to the A4 format, particularly the shorter (but much more numerous) news articles, the clearer labelling of the Lens Cap features (so no longer is there an initial confusion over why a potential war in Indonesia might involve people playing frisbee at sundown) and the inclusion of a specific activist news section.

One complaint has been the smaller size of the text being difficult to read (we are investigating how to balance this so we don't lose content but also retain the clean look). Other comments have included fears over a potential lessening of the depth of our coverage and also over the shorter comment section.

All of these are valid complaints, and we are having to strike a balance because inevitably, if you put more folds and edges in a paper you get slightly less space overall for the text.

Clever tweaking from our sub this issue has hopefully fixed the smaller text size problem without losing too much content, as it is now (apart from the In Briefs and Blogspot) only a shade smaller than our larger format last year.

In terms of article length, it has actually been a bit of a relief to have have shorter pieces. When you're on deadline and trying desperately to find enough relevant and important information to fill that last little bit of a lead article, then it makes all the difference. Generally, what can be said in 600 words can be said in 500 – a full and in-depth background requires much more space.

RR

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 1st March 2008 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 21st February. You can send your articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

The latest pronouncement from the government, in the shape of new Housing Minister Caroline Flint, about council tenants being evicted if they do not find work beggars belief. In her first interview since getting the job in the reshuffle after Peter Hain finally resigned, she courted the headlines by saying that new council tenants should be expected to actively seek work as part of the terms of their tenancy.

The idea itself is unworkable in the current situation. Council tenants evicted for not looking for work would, in the main, have to be re-housed under homelessness legislation. Evictions cost money and, in my experience, councils don't go immediately for eviction for people who would be rehoused. Aside from the extra stress to the tenants, it's hard to see any policy gain from this – unless victimising the poorest is the aim. Simultaneously, Flint suggested that job centres and other employment services should be moved closer to the hot spots of unemployment, including on out of town housing estates. This, at the same time that services are being withdrawn from many areas. A lot of job centres have been privatised. In 2004, 42 job centres and benefit offices were shut. Last year, more closures were announced in rural areas in the South West, leaving claimants, some of whom may well be council tenants, having to pay to travel to towns further away. Another example of joined up government, perhaps?

Flint's plan of victimising council tenants who are unemployed is barking – it even

brought condemnation from the Tories. As usual, it is about creating a climate of fear. If you might lose your home, that minimum wage job that's hard to get to starts to look more attractive.

Why is it that council and housing association tenants are always used as whipping boys for the tabloid press and politicians in search of a headline? Despite the headlines, there are already plenty of things that council or housing association tenants can lose their home for. Many council tenancies include conditions that will cause you to lose your home if you engage in anti-social behaviour, or allow people visiting your home to do so. Funnily enough, my mortgage agreement has no such clause. Should I get into a dispute with a council tenant over the road, they have much more at stake. If you rent privately, the landlord may care about what you do, but so long as you pay the rent and don't damage the property they may well not.

Thirty years ago, people from many different walks of life lived in council housing. Someone I knew who worked for Camden said they had MPs and barristers as council tenants. Since then, the combination of the right to buy and no new building has meant that council housing has become concentrated in the poorest sectors of society. It is the option of last resort for many of the most vulnerable. What sort of government is it that wishes to curtail the rights of the most vulnerable? Let's hope Flint doesn't get to be as hard as her name.

Svartfrosk

Blog Bites

(from labourstart.org)

Back in 1974, I was a student in Cornell University's labour relations program working during the summer for a union in New York City. The union's education director (today its president) suggested to me that I quit university and go to work in a factory where I could organise workers. That was the way to get involved in the trade union movement, he told me. I pondered the offer – it would have involved moving to Indiana – and eventually decided not to do it.

Thanks to the Internet, that scenario is no longer possible.

I had been a political activist for a few years by then (I started quite young) but there was really no way for a factory owner in Indiana to know who I was. I probably could have covertly entered the factory and helped unionise it.

Today, factory owners are a mouse-click from knowing everything about each of us. The old strategy of blacklisting – employed so successfully against unions like the IWW for so many years – has now become infinitely more effective thanks to the net.

According to a recent report, "Starbucks managers discovered that two pro-union employees in New York were graduates of a Cornell University

labour program ... Managers took the names of graduates from an online Cornell discussion group and the school's Web site and cross-checked them with employee lists nationwide. They found that three employees in California, Michigan and Illinois were graduates of the program and recommended that local managers be informed."

That's pretty clever – Starbucks was not only looking for troublemakers, but for potential troublemakers, or people who might have sat in class next to troublemakers. Using the techniques of data-mining, human resources staff are going to be able to block the employment not only of trade union organisers, but of people who might be friends with union organisers.

Many of us, myself included, have long argued that unions should make the best use possible of the net, and that the net offers us new possibilities to organise, to campaign, to strengthen our unions. The low cost and global reach of the net, we believed, we empower unions and level the playing field in the struggle with employers.

But the net also offers new possibilities for union-busters and there is some evidence that corporations are using the net more effectively than we do.

Every little helps

On 6th October 2007 (page 3) *Freedom* reported on the government's 'consultation' on nuclear power which was totally in favour of that highly secretive industry.

A copy was sent to Greenpeace, contributing to their information about the other eight such 'consultations' around Britain (greenpeace.org.uk/blog/climate/). Greenpeace are now considering the possibility of suing the PR company who organised these events and are complaining to the body that oversees that profession.

Widely publicised plans to extend wind farms around the coastline do not mean that the government have given up attempts to persuade the private sector to build new nuclear power stations. Meanwhile, Gordon Brown has spoken about public consultations on having a written constitution – watch this space!

Martin S. Gilbert

Freedom thoughts

I have enclosed some thoughts regarding the questionnaire. I hope you find something useful in them!

Before you read them I should say you are doing a terrific job which is important and is much valued and appreciated. You know very well your circumstances about production and its problems, etc., and I'm sure you have well-thought out ideas on how to go forward. Whatever changes you make I will fully understand that there are good reasons for doing so. Any comments I make are fully intended to be helpful – I hope many have written to you with ideas which may spark a useful outcome.

On frequency: I would prefer fortnightly because it helps to maintain interest – stops you drifting away. Other publications, e.g. *Direct Action*, are well produced but the content becomes non-topical, dated and seems too distant, too remote, etc.

A monthly edition would tend toward theoretical content as political events move ever more quickly. A purely theoretical journal could be a specific publication hard copy or online on a periodical basis or irregular (not quite the same as *Raven*). A monthly analytical publication would be okay but it may reduce the number of readers and narrow the readership.

On size: If A4 is easier for production, etc., then yes. A new format can stimulate new layout and content design which would be visually more interesting.

On style: A snappier A4 fortnightly could work really well and attract more readers. At present some of the articles are perhaps too long. For example, the Steve Booth article could have been split into two. I found it unreadable because I am not familiar with what he was discussing.

A good balance of content would have a wide appeal. I enjoy the book reviews if they are not too long and the recent review of other anarchist publications was excellent. The quiz and Svartfrosk column are always

enjoyable, while the commentary and the editorial with Angel Alley are good – they help the reader to be closer and the writing is excellent. A vibrant letters page is essential to maintain readers' interest.

The recent feature 'Great Beyond' was outstanding – more like this please.

Perhaps: advertise your own Freedom Press books, etc., selectively, perhaps themed (as much as on the website). More detail on what finance you need, and what is required and how income/people can help.

On content: News and stories of where self-help/collectives are/have been unsuccessful. It's important to take an overview of the range of anarchist groups and radicals whilst maintaining your own position. You shouldn't fall into a closed in, sectarian view which inevitably leads to isolation.

Cover news of what local anarchist groups are doing even if it's not spectacular – invite them to make regular local bulletins for publication – i.e. to be correspondents.

At present many politically aware people have voted with their feet and left political parties but are still searching for answers – articles and features on topics that explain anarchism, etc., can help to attract these people while also reinforcing the views of confirmed anarchists and perhaps developing discussion for the letters page.

What would attract? An attractive front page/masthead is clear and eye catching. A layout that makes reading comfortable. Friends and workmates could be approached by readers to try a copy, local anarchist groups with which contacts has been established could be approached to take more copies (as they have an active input to *Freedom* through their bulletins).

Other suggestions: Establish a fighting fund for donations and monthly contributions. Establish a network of correspondents based on subject matters, geographically and in individual anarchist or self-help groups. Whatever the ownership of *Freedom* is, could this be amended to encourage more funding, etc.

Graham Hall

Chris Sprigg

"Freedom is the possibilities of becoming". We only ask of people that they think for themselves. Perhaps all understanding is progressive?

It was said of Chris Sprigg that he enjoyed arguing on behalf of opinions conflicting with and opposing his own; thus to enrich the dialectic and find the elements of truth inherent in all arguments.

The openness, generosity and science of his attitudes manifested themselves in his relationships, writing and the creative political activity and Marxism of his late 20s; as well as in the manner of his death – covering the retreat of his comrades on the hills above Madrid at the battle of Jarama on 12th February 1937.

Chris Sprigg (Caudwell was his mother's maiden name which he used for serious writing) was born in 1907, the younger son

of a journalist. He had a Catholic education and left school at 14 to become a cub journalist himself.

He never went to university. He earned his living by editing aeronautical journals and writing detective novels. In the mid 1930s he studied Marxism, joined the Communist Party and went to live in a commune in Poplar. It was here, alongside many political activities – Catholic-Marxist dialogues, popular front organisation and *Daily Worker* sales – that he committed the writing that has made him something of a legend amongst radical intellectuals.

Out of his interest in poetry he wrote *Illusion and Reality* with his profound reworking of Freudian psychoanalysis; out of his deep subjectivity his essays *Studies in a Dying Culture*, and out of his concern at the conflict between the social relations and entelechy within contemporary science his superb notes of *The Crisis in Physics*.

What would he have thought of Britain and the world today, where human solidarity is broken up at every turn, and individuality has become, for many, a digit on a computer screen; while most of us exist in poverty or die young from war and disease?

David Kessel

Adrian de Peyer

Some fifty-seven years ago Adrian was an anarchist – as good as I ever met. Very odd having an anarchist as Head Boy in a fee paying school.

One way to teach teachers? Curious about his subsequent life, Google brought up: "This performance is dedicated to the memory of Adrian de Peyer who died, sadly, on 18th October. Over a 10-year period from 1992 Adrian made many memorable contributions to Club concerts, including singing a number of the leading tenor roles in the annual opera."

Does anyone have any news or memories of Adrian?

Anon

Contact Freedom with any information at the usual address.

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GETTING ACTIVE

PRISON NEWS

Solidarity with Andrea!

Last year Berlin anti-fascist Andrea was arrested by plain clothes cops of LKA's political branch. She was in a neighbourhood in south east Berlin where a neo-nazi demonstration was taking place.

She will have now to spend her next 12 months behind bars and therefore she absolutely needs all our support from outside the walls. In July last year the Munich local court sentenced her to four months without probation. She had a pepper-spray on her. Even though on that day there was no lefty demonstration taking place, and therefore it was legal to carry a pepperspray, the court said that on that day a 'state of exception' had been declared. Of course they forgot to inform the rest of the population about this.

Following this sentence, she also faced the loss of a preceding probation of three months, back then being caught with some eggs full of pepper during an anti-fascist action on 1st May 2005, in Berlin. During a process on 31st July, under which several old allegations against her were brought up, she has been sentenced to another five months. On top of this come two months without probation following a squatting action in the Liebigstrasse, Berlin-Friedrichshain.

These sentences are clearly political ones, meaning that an engaged and unwilling-to-bow-down activist has been sent away for a quite considerable time.

Write her letters and postcards to: Andrea Neff, Bnr: 746/0712, Justizvollzugsanstalt für Frauen in Berlin, Arkonastraße 56, 13189 Berlin, Deutschland

In for sock stealing

Cassidy Wheeler is serving eight and a half years in the USA for stealing a pair of socks! He's starting some projects to "educate and inspire ... fellow prisoners, such as a penpal exchange, a radical library, a virtual world tour (a collection of annotated prisoners)."

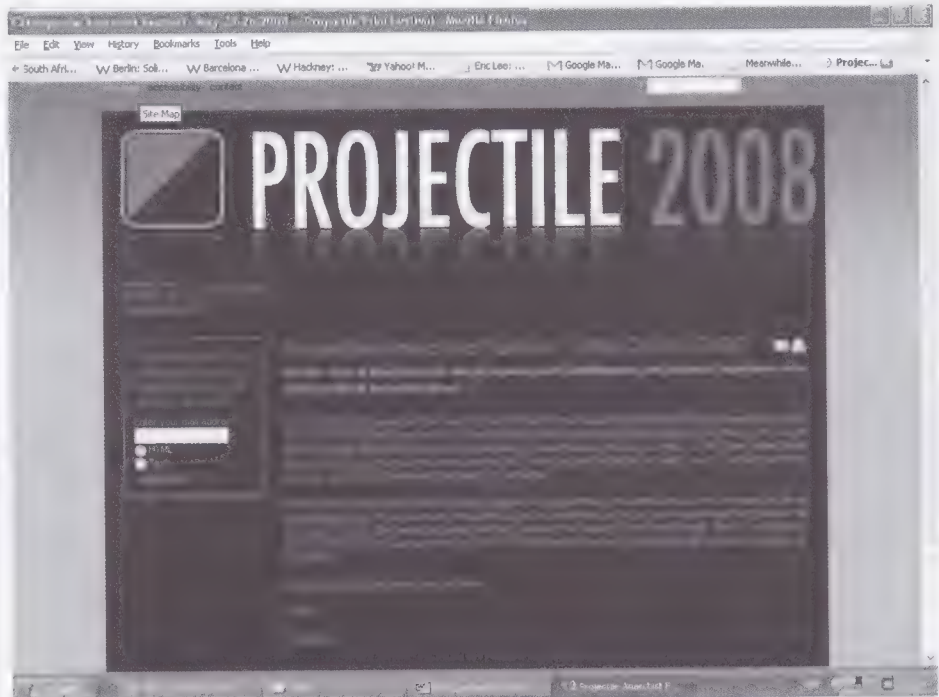
Write to him at: Cassidy Wheeler #14282456, TRCI, 82911 Beach Access Rd, Umatilla, OR 97882, USA

First female prison death of 2008

Lisa Marley, aged 32, died on 23rd January while in the care of HMP Styal. On 5th February a protest, the 28th since 2004, was held outside the prison in Cheshire. Campaigner Pauline Campbell said: "The tragic death of the young mother Lisa Marley highlights a great injustice whereby women are being detained in prisons that cannot meet their human needs. Prisons have a duty to take care of everyone entrusted to them, and any death represents a failure. Lisa Marley is the sixth woman to die in the care of Styal Prison since my daughter's death in January 2003, raising serious questions about the prison's custodial care record. I am angry that lessons have not been learned."

"Forty-one women have died in prisons in England since my daughter's death. Prisons are unsafe places which constantly fail to uphold the duty of care that the Prison Service has to all prisoners. People must speak out. It's medieval."

Styal's troubled history is well known. Between August 2002-August 2003, six women died in the 'care' of the jail. Pauline's daughter Sarah was the third woman to die in this appalling sequence and, at 18, the youngest.



● The Projectile anarchist film and culture festival is once again organising for the last weekend in May (23rd to 26th) at the Star and Shadow cinema in Newcastle. And, as it's a bank holiday, there will be even more delights on offer as it'll be on that bit longer. There are a few fresh faces (and ideas) involved this time and the collective are hopeful that they have secured a couple of major coups – there are rumours of a Noam Chomsky video link, though nothing is as yet confirmed.

The collective are still in the fairly early stages of programming the event and so are still open to ideas and suggestions. If you have any, would like to put on something or us to show a particular film, let them know through the website at projectile.org.uk (pictured). They are particularly keen on things like multimedia pieces, talks, music suggestions, etc.

● Haringey Solidarity Group (HSG) are concerned about a £2,000-£2,500 shortfall in income for the collective, and are likely to be scaling back some of their activities as a result. A fund-raising appeal to bring HSG back into the black is going to be drafted for March alongside a pruning of the groups newsletter to only include interested parties. Currently mailout costs HSG £6 per person per year, and HSG are planning to ask for a £10/£5 waged/unwaged offering to continue the mailout.

HSG are also involved in the organisation of a new Hackney Solidarity Network, which is set to meet bi-monthly, as a networking and news-sharing opportunity for local community groups in the area.

For more information on HSG and related initiatives, contact info@haringey.org.uk or phone 0845 223 5270.

● ChristieBooks, the class-struggle publishing and media group named after nearly-Franco-assassin Stuart Christie, has

relaunched its web presence with a new set of films at christiebooks.com.

The site, which hosts a multimedia archiving project, has pledged not to carry advertising and will be reliant on donations and sales of its books, prints and other media.

The new titles include two of Buñuel's Mexican films with English sub-titles. The films are black comedies about men with dark obsessions. *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz* and *This Strange Passion* were both made in the 1950s.

The Talk of the Town, a 1942 film by George Stevens, stars Cary Grant as an anarchist falsely accused of burning down the factory in which he works.

Berkeley in the '60s meanwhile, though broken down into ten sections due to musical copyright difficulties, is "one of the most powerful documentaries we have yet seen on the growth of the US radical movement in the 1960s".

To be kept up to date on the group's activities contact christiebooks1@gmail.com or contact ChristieBooks, PO Box 35, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 2UX

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Land and bread

Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra

Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, or MST), is the largest social movement in Latin America with an estimated 1.5 million landless workers organised in 23 out of 27 states. An ideologically eclectic rural movement inspired by liberation theology, Marxism, the Cuban Revolution and a variety of other leftist ideologies, the MST strives to achieve long-overdue land reform in Brazil.

Since its foundation in 1984, the MST has peacefully occupied unused land where its members have established cooperative farms, constructed houses, schools for children and adults and clinics, promoted indigenous cultures, a healthy and sustainable environment and gender equality. The movement has won land titles for more than 350,000 families in 2,000 settlements, and 180,000 encamped families currently await government recognition.

From the grassroots level up to the State and National Coordinating Bodies, the MST is organised entirely through collective units that make decisions through discussion, reflection and consensus. The basic organisational unit is known as a 'Núcleo de Base'; this represents ten to fifteen families living in either an MST encampment or MST settlement, and is responsible for addressing the issues faced by the member-families. Every one of the MST's 475,000 families participates in a Núcleo de Base. Members elect two representatives, one woman and one man, to represent them at settlement/encampment meetings. These representatives attend regional meetings where they in turn elect regional representatives who then vote for members of the State Coordinating Body of the MST. In total, there are 400 members of the MST's State Coordinating Bodies (+/- 20 per state) and 60 members of the movement's National Coordinating Body (+/- 2 per state).

Over 90% of the movement's Coordinators – Regional, State and National – live in MST settlements or encampments. This is an important strategy of the MST, serving to maintain an ongoing and direct flow of communication between member-families and their representatives. Coordinators are aware of the realities faced by member-families and are encouraged to discuss important issues with said families. To facilitate communication between Coordinators and member-families, and as an attempt to democratise the media, the MST produces two major publications, the *Jornal Sem Terra* and the *MST Informa*.



MST activists ready for action

The MST formed its education sector in Rio Grande do Sul in 1986, a year after the first national convention. By 2001, about 150,000 children were enrolled in 1,200 movement-run primary and secondary schools in its settlements and camps. The schools employ 3,800 teachers, many of them MST-trained. The movement has trained 1,200 educators who run courses for 25,000 young people and adults, it trains primary-school teachers in most states and has set up partnerships with international agencies including UNESCO and UNICEF. It reached agreement with seven institutions of higher education in different regions to provide degree courses in education for MST teachers.

Between 2002 and 2005 the movement taught over 50,000 landless workers to read and write, and in 2005 the first graduating class of its own Florestan Fernandes School, located in Guararema, São Paulo, received their degrees in Specialised Rural Education and Development. Along with the Specialisation Course, a partnership with the University of Brasília, the Government and Via Campesina, over 40 agreements were developed with Federal, State and Community Colleges to hold an array of thematic courses such as Pedagogy, History and Agronomy, as well as technical courses of different skill levels.

The movement is also developing a model of sustainable agriculture on the lands its families farm. These efforts are gaining increasing importance as movement families

gain access to an increasing amount of Brazil's unproductive land. For example, the Chico Mendes Center for Agroecology, founded on 15th May 2004 in Ponta Grossa, Paraná, Brazil, on land formerly used by Monsanto to grow genetically modified crops, intends to produce organic, native seed to distribute through the MST.

The Brazilian land reform conflict has been punctuated by episodes of violence perpetrated by both government authorities and the MST itself. In one notorious example, the Eldorado dos Carajás Massacre, 19 MST members were gunned down while blocking a national route. The MST on its part has also been accused of engaging in violence, including an accusation of responsibility for the torture and assassination of police officers, although there is debate as to whether or not the perpetrators of the acts in question were in fact MST members.

As well as occupying derelict farms and public buildings, the MST has also engaged in direct action and vandalism of corporate property. However, its success, in its own view, lies first and foremost in its ability to organise and educate. Members have not only managed to secure land, and therefore food security for their families, but also continue to develop a sustainable socio-economic model that offers a concrete alternative to today's globalisation that puts profits before people and humanity.

(adapted from
Wikipedia/Friends of the MST website)

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON

FEBRUARY

17th Southampton's Third Seed Swap from 10am to 4pm at Woolston Community Centre, Woolston, Southampton, for more details see octoberbooks.org/seedswap.

17th and 24th Sunday picnic to campaign against anti-protest exclusion zone around Parliament, meet at 1.30pm on the green at Parliament Square, Westminster, London and bring food to share, games to play and good idead. This event will be held every Sunday.

29th Critical Mass London, meet at 6pm on the South Bank under Waterloo Bridge, see criticalmasslondon.org.uk.

MARCH

2nd Sunday picnic to campaign against anti-protest exclusion zone around Parliament, meet at 1.30pm on the green at Parliament Square, Westminster, London and bring food to share, games to play and good idead.

2nd Oxford Seedy Sunday seed swap from 2pm to 3.30pm at Fusion Arts at the back of East Oxford Community Centre, Princess Street, off Cowley Road, Oxford.

5th Southampton No2ID group meeting from 8pm to 9pm at the Dolphin public house, Osbourne Street South, SO17 2EZ. 15th Dublin Anarchist Bookfair at the Teachers Club, Parnell Square, see www.wsm.ie/bookfair for details.

24th Aldermaston 2008 'The Bomb Stops Here' – celebrate 50 years of protest since the first Aldermaston march in 1958, see cnduk.org/aldermaston for details.

28th Critical Mass London, meet at 6pm on the South Bank under Waterloo Bridge by the National Film Theatre, see criticalmasslondon.org.uk

Smash EDO Tour 2008 – for almost four years the Smash EDO campaign have been demonstrating outside EDO/MBM, the US arms manufacturers in Brighton, and the campaign will be touring the UK (or beyond) showing the new full length film *On The Verge* (trailer at smashedo.org.uk). For details of dates confirmed so far, see www.schnews.org.uk/schmovies/index-on-the-verge.htm

APRIL

1st Fossil Fools Day, a day of action against the fossil fuel industry called by Rising Tide International, see fossilfuelsday.org or risingtide.org.uk for more.

MAY

17th Anarchist Bookfair hosted by the 1 in 12 Club, 21–23 Albion Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD1 2LY, from 12 noon until 6pm (stalls at £5 a table) followed by a Social in the evening.

18th Anarchist Writers, Publishers and Design at 1 in 12 Club, 21–23 Albion Street, Bradford, from 10am until 4pm, tickets £5, contact sam@samjackson6.orangehome.co.uk or call 0777 914 7005

BOOKS

Liber Malorum: Children Of The Apple

edited by Sean Sculion
published by PagAnarchy Press, £11.95
www.paganarchy.net

Liber Malorum is a pagan anarchist tapestry; a collaborative work of occult fiction created by 23 authors and woven together. As a challenge to these celebrity-author-saturated times, the book's structure itself is that of a non-hierarchical cooperative project.

Many connections arise; both those consciously written into the text and those synchronistically part of the natural system of the book. It is a book the universe has a free hand in and the open-hearted reader is able to integrate and create their own connections through the process of each reading. There are no gods but what readers create for and of themselves.

The stories and poems of *Liber Malorum* quest variously into the realms of magic, witchcraft, anarchism, psychedelic drugs and sex. There are spiritual uprisings in the desert, rebellion in the groves and woods, pirates, criminals, faerie huggers, subversives queering from police cells, tricksters and shape shifters. Keep your eyes out too for the myriad of subtleties and nuances, messages and codes throughout. This is the stuff of the underground cult classic.



Liber Malorum is not an easy read or chewing gum for the mind, any more than following your heart instead of the rules is a comfortable option. Whoever reads this book is not tidily created but a powerful creator, weavers themselves. In a world where people are so used to being caged, being called out of comfort zones into freedom of spirit, mind and body can feel odd. There is no anchoring belief system to hold onto in the unknown – the crossing of boundaries and limits is everywhere and the unfolding of infinite possibility is a distinct possibility.

This book is not the territory, it may not even be the map – think of it more as a flying carpet or a moving celebration of life that's going somewhere in the general direction of liberation.

Katie Lambert

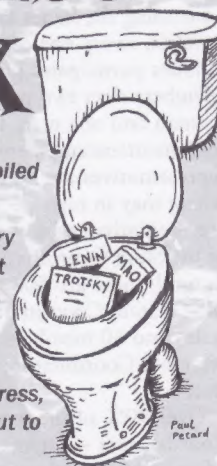
The Anarchist Quiz Book

Who said "I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet"?

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QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Lucy Parsons. It was opposed by the local police department, who are still reliving the Haymarket incident from 1886.
2. The Saudis banned it, claiming it was a Jewish conspiracy. The UAE clerics issued a fatwa against it. They condemned it for promoting gambling, something which makers Nintendo denied; and for promoting the 'Jewish-Darwinist' idea of evolution,

- because the different characters progress by evolving. Which is apparently unislamic.
3. The threat of conscription into the Canadian army. The riots were triggered after a man exempted from military service was arrested, and went on for five days and four nights.
4. As being comprised of "these 47 states and the Soviet of Washington".

The anarchist past

While not complete, a new collection of Nicholas Walter's review work offers an excellent introduction to the man, finds Richard Alexander

It is a strange feeling to be reviewing a collection of essays written by someone who was the main book reviewer for *Freedom* for many years. And a humbling one, as I don't have the family background, detailed knowledge, foreign language capabilities or professional expertise that Nicolas Walter brought to his reviews.

Often with Nicolas's reviews one almost got the impression that maybe he should have written the books he was reviewing himself, and now at last we have one written by Nicolas to review, albeit a selection of his texts, chosen by somebody else.

David Goodway has done his usual excellent job of selecting an interesting and varied collection of items around the main theme of the title essay *The Anarchist Past*, something that Nicolas was expert in, and which shows in his detailed critiques of John Quail's *The Slow Burning Fuse* and Paul Avrich's book on the Russian anarchists, and which could be usefully appended to any future editions of those works.

Several of the articles, taken from diverse sources, including introductory passages to books and pamphlets still in print, deal directly or indirectly with Freedom Press itself, both his own connections with it or people who had been associated with it, such as Charlotte Wilson and Lillian Wolfe.

That said, the main emphasis is on the grand old men and women of anarchism starting with items on William Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, several on Kropotkin, Joseph Lane and Emma Goldman, in a roughly chronological order.

David has also included the essay on the Marquis de Sade, taken from *The Raven* no. 7, written under the name of Jean Raison, which is a good example of the numerous nom de plumes that Nicolas used over the years. (The introduction also mentions that Nicolas used Arthur Freeman, Mary Lewis, Anna Freeman and M.H. – which was originally used for 'Many Hands' in *Freedom* but which Nicolas appropriated for his own use over time.)

The volume also has some items on more recent writers such as Colin Ward and Murray Bookchin. Indeed the only two articles on general political themes are the last two: one about democracy and the lengthy discussion of the use of violence in anarchist practice and theory, occasioned by another in the series of attacks by the Angry



Drawing of Nicolas Walter by Clifford Harper

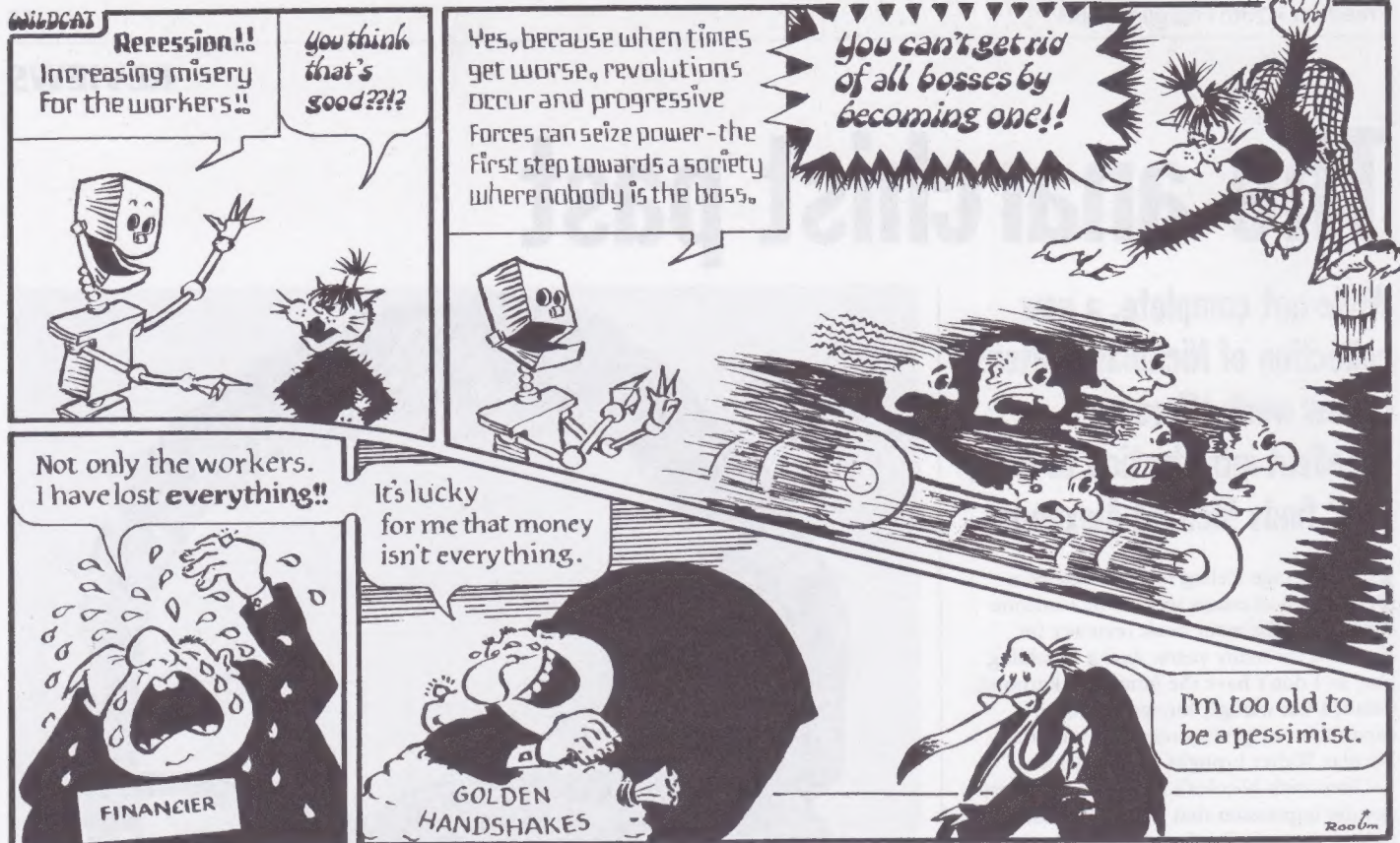
Brigade, which has stood the test of time better than much of the other material written in the early 1970s.

Although Nicolas is usually associated with the non-violent wing of the movement, he is generally even-handed in his discussions about violence, avoiding moralising generalisations, and able to explain why some people are sometimes driven to use it.

As the volume is only 250 pages in length, there is simply no space for any of Nicolas's enormous output of letters, some of which were, admittedly, rather nit-picking in nature

about other people's reviews or comments. (It is estimated he wrote well over 14,000 letters to the press of which over 2,000 were published – I doubt any publisher would want the job of issuing a complete works which included them all, but I hope that somewhere someone has them all filed away for posterity.)

Besides being an expert on anarchist history, Nicolas was actively involved in the peace and anti-nuke weapons campaigns, and readers may be wondering where his



Reviews

➡ page 15

writings on the Spies for Peace episode and his essays on non-violence from the 1960s are. I've been informed that hopefully they will be included in a second volume of writings that may be issued in the near future.

Equally there was no space to include Nicolas's material on secularism (he was involved with the Rationalist Press Association from 1975 to 1999), but I've no idea if there are any plans to issue a collection of such writings.

To return to the current volume, David Goodway has contributed a most useful and informative introduction detailing the main events in Nicolas's life from his student days through to his death from cancer in early 2000. It is, of course, a cliché to say of people that they are sorely missed, but in

this case it is true, as nobody has been able to combine Nicolas's abilities and knowledge and brought them to bear on the current output of books on anarchist themes.

This book goes a small way to filling that gap and reminding us of the standards we should aspire to when writing on anarchist themes and doing our book reviews.

I'm sure Nicolas would dismiss this review as hack-work, which it is, as I had little or no direct contact with him so cannot give you any personal stories; and I don't have the historical knowledge to bring to bear on the movement in the 1960s or earlier. What I can do is inform the reader that this is a well-designed and put together book, attractively priced, with a representative collection of articles by an articulate and informed practitioner of anarchism, which will be invaluable for any student of anarchist history.

Nicolas Walter, *The Anarchist Past and other essays*, edited by David Goodway, published by Five Leaves, £9.99

THE QUIZ

1. Who has, controversially, just had a park named after them in Chicago?
2. What was the response of Islamic scholars in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to the Pokemon craze? What were their reasons?
3. From 28th March to 1st April, the city of Québec was hit by rioting. What were the rioters protesting about?
4. In response to the wildcat strikes of the workers in Seattle, how did the US Postmaster General refer to the US in the 1930s?

Answers on page 14

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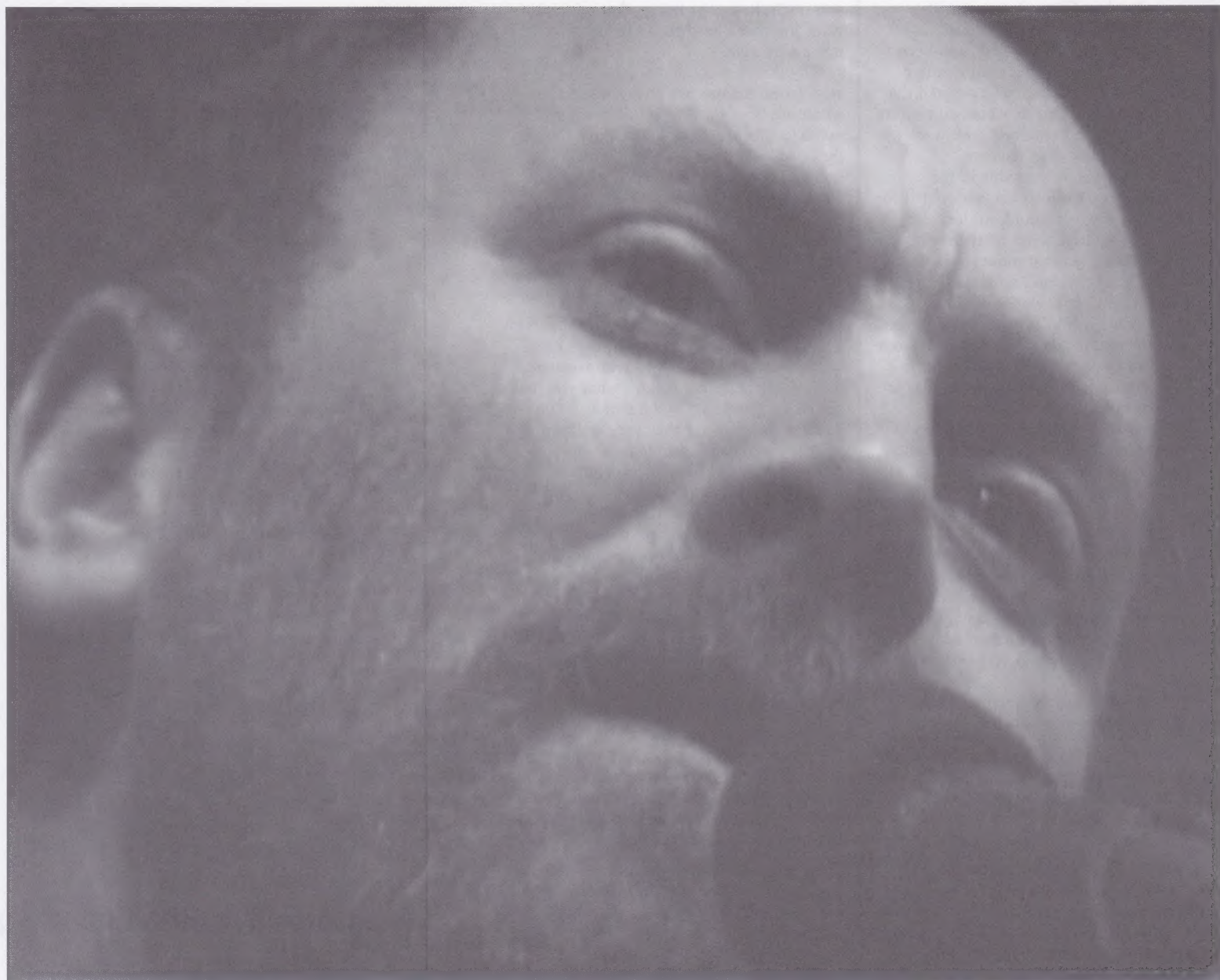
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live and get along, which I think is amazing coming from Palestinians, most of whom have had immediate family members killed by Israeli soldiers, most of whom have been arrested, many of whom have been tortured. If other people are not saying that kind of thing I don't think that anybody should be even remotely surprised.

JH: For many people, I guess particularly here in the US, your outspoken support of Hezbollah and admiration for Hassan Nasrallah would nevertheless be somewhat difficult to stomach.

DR: People tend to lump so-called 'Islamist' movements together, and really that's not something that can be done. Islam is just far too diverse a religion and there's far too many things going on to be able to do that.

The political differences between Hezbollah and groups like Al-Qaeda, for example, are so massive that the differences far outweigh the similarities. The kind of tactics that Al-Qaeda engages in, and the kind of rigid, Islamist, Sharia Law type of mentality that the leadership of Al-Qaeda have, has nothing to do with Hezbollah.

As far as I'm concerned, Hezbollah are engaged in a very justified struggle for the sovereignty of their country and their people. Sure, they're not beyond criticism, but I think they're an extremely impressive organisation and worthy of a lot of praise in a lot of different areas.

They're running a lot of different institutions in Lebanon such as the television station and the hospital; they have almost no corruption to speak of – when they get

money, they use it for what they say they're going to use it for. South Beirut was completely destroyed by Israel last summer, and since then Hezbollah has built twenty-five thousand houses, some of the buildings bigger than they were before the war. I don't think there's any government outside of Cuba that is capable of that kind of efficiency and service to their fellow people. They've also evolved quite a bit since their inception to become much more inclusive, much less dogmatic, and also much more pro-gender equality, with women at virtually all levels of the organisation now.

Nasrallah knows that he represents the vast majority of the Shia, but he's not trying to pretend he represents everybody else, and he's not saying that he should. Hezbollah don't want to see the Shia running Lebanon,